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ABSTRACT

Information reporting at traditionally black colleges and universities was reviewed, based on the Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS) files for 36 institutions. The objective was to determine the quality of the data submitted by seven of these institutions, and to suggest actions for improving the quality of the HEGIS information so that it will be more supportive of the historically black institutions. The Information Services Project of the Center for Higher Education Management Systems field tested the utility of HEGIS data. It was found that there was widespread misunderstanding of reporting conventions for financial and student data in particular. The major comparability question was that land-grant and non-land-grant institutions were intermingled, leading to a distorted reviews/expenditures index. In regard to policy relevance, most institutions felt that the time lag precluded usefulness in planning (i.e., HEGIS data is 24 months out of date). Recommendations include the following: personnel responsible for campus reporting should advise the president and other administrators of the uses to which HEGIS data are being put; the reports coordinator should carefully review HEGIS reports to ensure that they conform to the latest guidelines and definitions manuals; and university presidents should continually challenge the validity of decisions and recommendations made concerning their institutions on the basis of HEGIS file data. Examples of uses being made of the HEGIS data file are cited, and attention is directed to overall concerns related to validity, accuracy, and comparability of data. (SW)

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INFORMATION REPORTING AT TRADITIONALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: A CALL TO ARMS

by

Jeanne E. Budig

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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INFORMATION REPORTING AT TRADITIONALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: A CALL TO ARMS

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JEANNE E. BUDIG

INTRODUCTION

With renewed vigor, the continued need for the more than one hundred and seven traditionally Black colleges and universities of the United States has been called into question. A recent Chronicle article (4)* compiled the major issues being advanced. The most recurrent argument is that the very success of the civil rights movement challenges the relevance of the historical mission of the Black colleges. Now that white colleges have opened their doors to Blacks, what is the purpose of the Black colleges? Now that prestigious universities actively recruit Black students, often offering superior financial aid, why should a Black consider attending a less wealthy and less prestigious Black institution? Indeed, it is a unique burden on the president of a Black college or university frequently to defend the continued existence of his institution.

The purpose of this study is to review the public information so "HEGIS" (Higher Education General Information Survey) file for thirty-six traditionally Black public four year colleges and universities, to determine the quality of the data submitted by seven of these institutions, and to suggest actions for improving the quality of the HEGIS information so that it will be more supportive of the historically Black institutions.

The HEGIS Data File. Through the Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS) system, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) annually (since 1966) collects data from all of the colleges and universities in the United States. There are five major surveys collected annually and three minor surveys collected periodically. The major surveys

* See Bibliography, Number Indicated.

3

are Institutional Characteristics, Financial Statistics, Opening Fall Enrollment, Earned Degrees, and Employees. The periodic surveys are Facilities, Residency and Migration, and Libraries. Collectively, the HEGIS information file is the primary source of comprehensive information about higher education today. It has become the major source of archival data on higher education and is widely used in doctoral dissertations on higher education administration and in major funded research studies of regional or national scope. Because of the diversity of the higher education enterprise in the United States, comparative analysis is often difficult.

THE QUALITY OF HEGIS DATA: SEARCH OF THE LITERATURE

Quality issues may be examined in terms of limitations inherent in the data themselves, or in terms of limitations imposed upon these data by users. Qualitative assessments of the data themselves deal with the issue of "validity" and "accuracy"; qualitative assessments of the utility of these data deal with the issues of "comparability" and "policy relevance." The literature is replete with studies varifying the quality of HEGIS data or exposing limitations in the data file as it presently exists.

Validity. As used herein, validity refers to the institution's provision of data requested by NCES. It reflects the institution's willingness or ability to follow classification schemes, to adhere to HEGIS definitions, and to follow HEGIS instructions carefully. Researchers began to question data validity in 1977 (1) and a major study to determine validity was commissioned shortly thereafter. the WESTAT Study (5) found validity problems in 24.9% of the sample institutions. Most common validity errors were in confusion regarding the definition of "full-time equivalent students" or in overstatement of revenues due to confusion over which student aid revenues to include and which to exclude.

Accuracy. A second problem related to the quality of the data itself is accuracy. As used in this paper, accuracy refers to the institution's provision of correct data. Possible threats to data accuracy are duplications, omissions, estimates, misclassifications, and multiple counts.

Some of these problems are prevalent, especially in HEGIS fall enrollment reports. The WESTAT study reported that 13.1% of all the sample institutions did not follow NCES definitions for student level. Thirteen percent reported a need to estimate enrollments, and 38% omitted students who enrolled late. Sixty-eight percent of the institutions attributed their difficulties to insufficient information about their students. The WESTAT study concludes the HEGIS enrollment figures are "highly accurate within the time frame that the survey form was completed." (5)

The accuracy of financial data was explored at length by Collier and Patrick (2) and Conger (3,9), who cited many data discrepancies. Their conclusion was that "the analysis of financial condition of the higher education industry as well as of individual institutions requires a higher degree of accuracy at the institutional level than can now be assured by the HEGIS financial data reports." (8)

The importance of these studies was to bring to the attention of the higher education community the need to improve the quality of the data. It is gratifying to note that the university administrative professional associations such as NACUBO (National Association for College and University Business Officers) have taken the initiative to improve data collection within their own technical areas. (9) In a similar vein, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) now publishes major definitive guidebooks to assist the institutions in improving the quality of data submitted in their HEGIS reports. (6,7)

Comparability. Comparability refers to the degree of similarity which exists among institutions, states, and the annual HEGIS survey themselves. In terms of assessing state funding patterns, comparability is threatened by different organizational patterns within the states. In terms of the surveys themselves, comparability is threatened by changes in the institutional composition of the HEGIS universe. Major problems were variation in state practices regarding debt expenditures and debt service (11), different ways to allocate central system office expenditures to individual campuses (3) different ways of treating full time and part time students (5,12) and different manners of state treatment of general revenue, staff benefits, and flow-through funds from the federal government. (8)

Policy Relevance. Policy relevance is a perceived fact, not one that can be measured in a quantifiable way. A major component of policy relevance is timeliness. Timeliness must be considered in tandem with statistical integrity. If an information system is designed to have the greatest total integrity, the system will lack the necessary flexibility to serve effectively the information needs of the policymakers. On the other hand, if the system is to be totally and instantly responsive to policy needs and pressures, the proper professional and institutional protection of statistical integrity cannot be maintained. The fact is that HEGIS data, in order to preserve the required level of statistical integrity, is always at least 24 months out of date by the time it is published. Timeliness and utility are both issues cited in the HEGIS

data quality surveys. (2,9,3,10,12)

RESEARCH DESIGN

From January to June, 1981, the author was employed by the Nation. Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) for the Informati· Services Project. The purpose of this project was to design and field-te "data shells" utilizing the most currently available HEGIS file, in order to make this major data resource available to university administrators a researchers. The unique feature of the system is the ability for the requestor to request the data on self-identified peer institutions; all dat are indexed against the norm of that peer group.

A cohort population of all thirty-six historically Black publi four-year institutions was identified and ten "data shells" prepared from HEGIS files for this population. Seven institutions from this population Lincoln University, Grambling, University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff, Souther University in New Orleans, Kentucky State University, Central State (Ohio and North Carolina Central University - were visited, with the following purposes:

(1) to determine the validity and accuracy of the HEGIS data on that institution,

(2) to assess the utility of the proposed Information Services as an NCHEMS "customer services" activity to assist University administrators and researchers in their work; and

(3) to determine if there are other data formats that would be equally (or more) useful to those requiring data.

Because of her association with the institutional research and planning community in the traditionally Black institutions through severa years' participation with the Southern Association for Institutional R search, the author took the initiative to expand the assignment to addi tionally review the data with the presidents of four more of the institutions, with senior institutional researchers at twelve of the institution and with the three major institutional research centers for data on the Black institutions: The Howard University Institute for Educational Pol (Dr. Kenneth Tollett); the 1890 Land-Grant section of the National Assoc ation for Land Grant Colleges and Universities (NASULGC; Dr. Leonard Hay III); and the National Association for Equal Opportunity (NAFEO) Data Exchange Center (Dr. Carol Smith). The information was also presented to Council of Presidents at the 1981 NAFEO Conference last March.

FINDINGS

Data Quality. Assessment of data accuracy and validity were in total agreement with the literature. There was widespread misunderstanding of reporting conventions for financial and student data in particular. The major comparability question was that land-grant and non-land grant institutions were intermingled, leading to a distorted revenues/ expenditures index. Regarding policy relevance, most institutions felt that the time lag precluded usefulness in planning: what good is two year old data?

Other Findings. A more important finding, in the opinion of the author, was the "informal" conclusion that the institutions knew very little about what has happened to the data after it left the institution. Because there has been absolutely no feedback to the institutions (including spot-checking of data, penalty for not providing it--unless imposed by State coordinating agencies), there has been no incentive to improve the quality of the data. Most of the senior administrators contacted, however, did NOT like the way their institution LOOKED ON PAPER, based on the information about them (and FROM them) in the HEGIS file.

DISCUSSION: USE BEING MADE OF THE HEGIS DATA FILE

Despite all of the severe limitations in the data, *it is the most comprehensive data file on higher education in the world today, and is being WIDELY used despite its well-documented limitations (usually with a disclaimer in the introduction)* by researchers, state coordinating boards, accrediting agencies, private research studies, regional and/or special interest groups . . . and federal agencies such as the Department of Justice, Department of Education, and the Government Accounting Office (GAO) in their studies and reports. Consider the following recent events:*

1. The 1976 higher education desegregation plans for the "border states" (Kentucky, Oklahoma, Arkansas) contained major provisions for funding and programmatic upgrading at the traditionally Black institutions. Missouri did not, because Lincoln University had, according to (HEGIS)

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* For example, a watershed study by McCoy and Halstead, Financing Higher Education in the Fifty States: Interstate Comparisons. FY76. FY1978. "Data Cautions" from the 1978 study. 1) the use of "campus" vs. "system" as a reporting unit; 2) the inclusion of vocational technical institutions; 3) the treatment of central administration costs; 4) varying organizational arrangements; 5) chargebacks; 6) counts of FTE students; 7) finances for hospitals, auxiliary enterprises and independent operations; 8) employee benefits; 9) debt service; 10) tuition remissions; 11) variance in public service; and 12) student aid. Each of these problems belongs in one of the four major categories of classification problems, omissions, comparability problems, or definitional problems.

enrollment data, achieved the 'desired effect of integration'.

2. Lincoln University received a MISIP grant for research in 1976. In 1978 and again, in 1981 we were denied eligibility because our enrollment, according to HEGIS data, was no longer predominantly Black.

3. In September, 1981, Lincoln University was denied membership in the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. We appealed that decision, citing that the full time population was still predominantly Black and that we were being unduly penalized because of the large part-time commuter population.

4. On March 11, 1982, seventeen traditionally Black colleges and universities were denied eligibility for Part B of the Developing Institutions Title III grant, where some $27 million had been set aside for the traditionally Black colleges*. At this time our appeal is pending.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the person responsible for coordinating th reports on each campus, particularly the HEGIS reports, take the immediat initiative to advise the president and other senior administrative officials of the uses to which HEGIS data is being put. It is further recommended that that person assume responsibility for thorough knowledge of HEGIS reporting definitions, particularly those identified 'difficult' or potentially troublesome areas. Through reading professional literature such as Association for Institutional Research (AIR) publications, Journa of Higher Education, and the University Business Officer, one comes to know changes in HEGIS reporting requirements, refinements of definitions, and resources available to assist the campuses in preparing better data. The reports coordinator should assume the responsibility for carefully reviewing HEGIS reports prepared by the technical area against the latest guidelines and definitions manuals, and conferring with the technical are before the reports leave campus to detect and correct possible problems.

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* From a letter to the University Presidents from Dr. Sam Myers, Executiv Director, National Association for Equal Opportunity, March 10, 1982.

. Part B, Eligibility Requirements, Special Needs Program, Title III. Federal Register Vol. 47, No. 2. Tuesday, January 5, 1982. P. 549, Section 626.2.

"Percent of FTE undergraduate enrollment receiving need-based assistance; Average Amount of need-based assistance per recipien (in dollars) and average education and general expenditure per F undergraduate student (in dollars) as reported in 1978-79 HEGIS."

One important mechanism is by trend analysis--comparing this year's reports data with those of previous years and noting data discrepancies. (It is important to note that these discrepancies are probably not errors, but probably differences of opinion in reporting definitions.)

It is equally important that university presidents, perhaps working through their respective associations, continually challenge the validity of decisions and recommendations made concerning their institutions on the basis of HEGIS file data. It is only by being aware of the vulnerability of the data that the institutions know where to direct their responses. This is particularly true of the leaders of the Traditionally and Historically Black Institutions as they continue to face the many challenges of the coming decades.

APPENDIX

INSTITUTIONS IN THIS STUDY

Alabama A & M University	Alabama State University
University of Arkansas Pine Bluff	Delaware State College
Florida A & M University	Albany State College
Fort Valley State College	Savannah State College
Kentucky State University	Grambling State College
Southern University New Orleans	Bowie State College
Coppin State College	Morgan State University
University of Maryland Eastern Shore	Alcorn State University
Jackson State University	Mississippi Valley State University
Lincoln University (Missouri)	North Carolina A & T State University
Winston-Salem State University	Langston University
Lincoln University Pennsylvania	Cheyney State College
South Carolina State College	Tennessee State University
Prairie View A & M University	Texas Southern University
Virginia State College	Norfolk State College
Bluefield State College	West Virginia State College
Southern University A & M Main Campus	North Carolina Central University

N = 36

COMPARABLE DATA STUDY FOR TRADITIONALLY BLACK PUBLIC FOUR YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

N = 36

1978-79 HEGIS

I. REVENUE

Category	Mean Value per FTE	Lincoln University value per FTE
State & Local Appropriations	$ 2,445	$ 3,190
Tuition & Fees	654	570
Endowment Income	9.97	-0-
Government Grants & Contracts	999	1,432
Private Gifts, Grants and Contracts	81.71	-0-
Other E & G Revenues	214	578
Total E & G Revenues	4,369	5,771

II. EXPENDITURES

Instruction	$ 1,716	$ 1,347
Research	291	1,373
Public Service	186	.85
Academic Support	436	325
Student Support	326	212
Institutional Support	582	794
Plant Maintenance & Operation	577	745
Scholarships & Fellowships	236	469
E & G Mandatory Transfers	51	19
Total E & G Expenditures	4,399	5,363

11

III. ENROLLMENT PARAMETERS	Mean Value of 37 Institutions	Lincoln Univers
Total Headcount		2,110
Total FTE Students	3,103	1,759
Percent Full Time Enrollment	76.8%	60.6%
Percent Part Time Enrollment	23.2%	39.4%
Percent Undergraduate	94.5%	94.6%
Percent Graduate	5.5%	5.4%
Percent Lower Division	57.0%	65.9%
Percent Upper Division	33.5%	28.7%
Percent Full Time Men	56.0%	46.7%
Percent Full Time Women	44.0%	53.3%

IV. FACULTY PARAMETERS (9-10 month faculty only)		
Percent Tenured	38.6%	36.4%
Percent Senior Faculty (Full and Associate Professors)	55.4%	43.1%
Average (10 month) salary: (1978-79)		
Full Professor	$ 22,912	$ 18,514
Associate Professor	19,034	16,731
Assistant Professor	15,889	13,982
Instructor	13,019	11,444
Total Average Faculty Salary	17,079	13,493

12

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